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ABSTRACT

This performance guide is designed for teachers to use with students before and after attending a storytelling performance of "Growing Up Cuban in Decatur, Georgia" by Carmen Agra Deedy. The guide, called a "Cuesheet," contains seven reproducible sheets for use in class, addressing: (1) A True Story (brief historical background on Cuba and questions in immigration and moving); (2) From Cuba to Georgia (a map of the southeastern U.S. and Cuba, with brief information on Carmen's family's exile); (3) The Storyteller (the author tells us about herself); (4) Storytelling (with questions for discussion regarding what makes a good storyteller and what makes a story worth telling); (5) Picture This (telling stories with images) and Resources (for more information about the storyteller, about Cuba, or about telling family stories); (6) Listen for These Lines (lines to think about before and after the performance; and (7) Tell Your Own Story (an activity to help students outline a story of their own to tell, and to evaluate it). (SR)

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"Growing Up Cuban in Decatur, Georgia": Carmen Agra Deedy. Cue Sheet for Students.

by Gail Carr

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Carmen Agra Deedy
Growing Up Cuban in Decatur, Georgia

The Kennedy Center

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Welcome to *Cuesheet*, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. This *Cuesheet* is designed for you to use before and after a storytelling performance of *Growing Up Cuban in Decatur, Georgia* by Carmen Agra Deedy.

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A True Story

The country of Cuba is an island located about 90 miles south of Florida. It also includes many smaller islands. The capital and largest city is Havana. People in Cuba speak Spanish.

The Cuban people have long struggled for independence. Christopher Columbus landed in Cuba in 1492 and claimed it for Spain, which ruled Cuba for about 400 years. Many revolts took place and many Cubans died. The United States helped Cuba defeat Spain in 1898. The U.S. then ruled Cuba until 1902.

dictator – a person who has absolute control of government, usually considered unjust

socialist – a form of government in which the people collectively own and control the businesses of the country

During the 1930s, Cuba had a **dictator**, Fulgencio Batista (full-JEN-see-oh bah-TEE-stah). In 1959, his government was overthrown in a revolution led by Fidel Castro and his followers. They set up a **socialist** government.

Castro promised the people of Cuba that he would make changes including free elections, fair government, better schools, good jobs, land and health care for all. People thought of him as a hero, but he did not keep his promises.

After the revolution, many Cubans who opposed Castro or supported Batista were forced to leave Cuba. They were ordered out of their homes and had to leave most of their belongings behind. Many went to the United States, Mexico, or Puerto Rico. Castro is still in control of Cuba, where there is only one political party–the Cuban Communist Party. All Cubans must belong to the party, or risk imprisonment.

Questions to Consider

Have you ever moved? If so, how did you feel about moving?

How would you feel now if your parents said you had to move to a new state next month? To a new country?

What if you moved to a place where no one spoke your language? Imagine that you have to leave behind all of your belongings. What would life be like in your new home?

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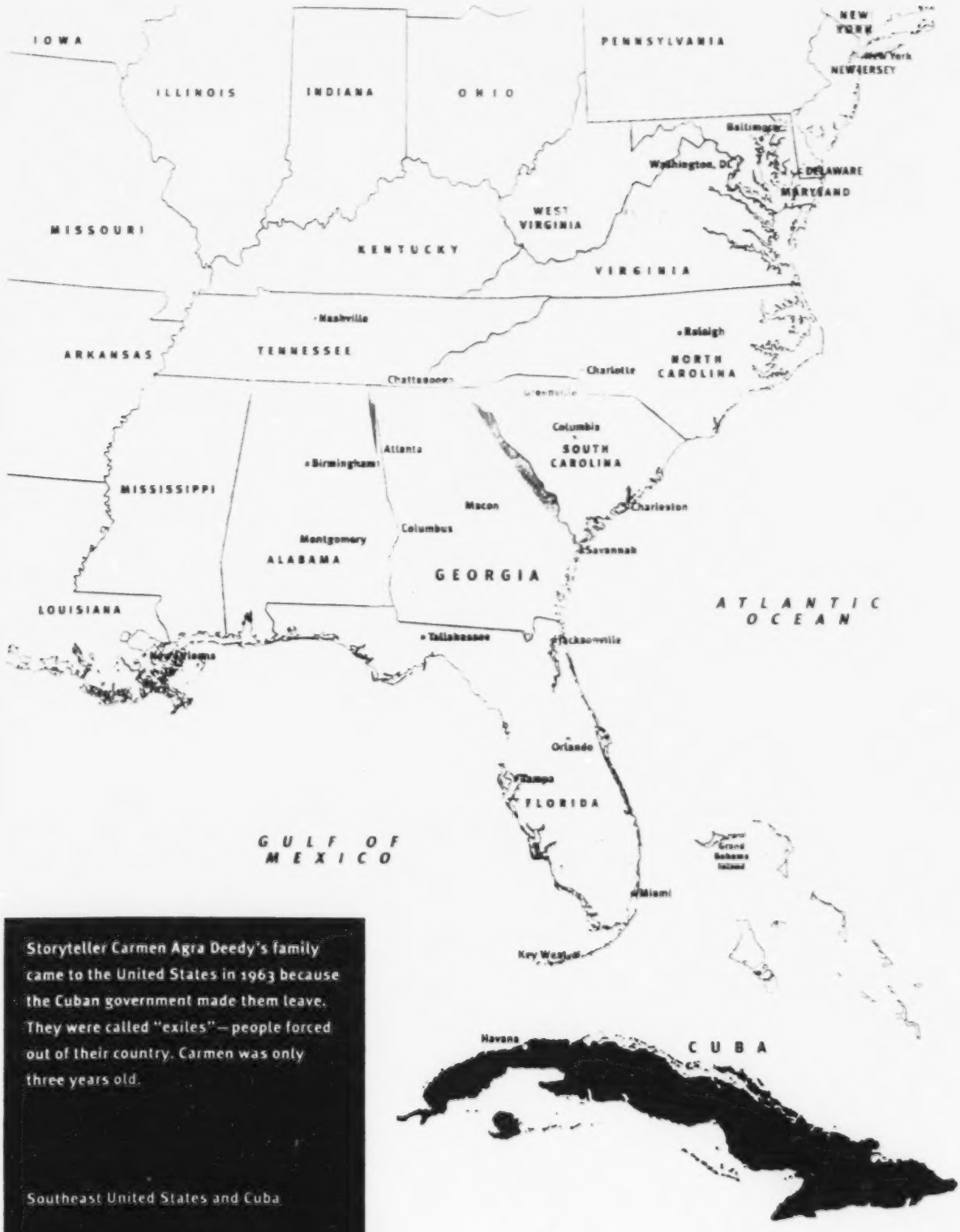
From Cuba to Georgia



Storyteller Carmen Agra Deedy's family came to the United States in 1963 because the Cuban government made them leave. They were called "exiles"—people forced out of their country. Carmen was only three years old.

Southeast United States and Cuba

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The Storyteller

When we left Cuba, we moved to Decatur, Georgia. I didn't speak English; I spoke Spanish. Georgia was different from Cuba! We were poor and had to start our lives over. Cubans were not considered white, and many people still **discriminated** against non-whites. Once, I was the only one in my class who received no valentines.
discriminate—to treat people unfairly based on race or nationality
My mother says I've been telling stories since the first time I got into trouble!
I receive many letters from people who enjoy my stories. I save them in boxes in my basement. When I'm an old lady and no one remembers my name, I'll wallpaper the house with these wonderful letters!
I have written five children's books. The first was *Agatha's Featherbed: Not Just Another Wild Goose Story.* I wrote it because my daughters were always asking "why" questions. It explains the origins of many commonplace things such as cotton and wool.
Now that I am an adult, I have three daughters: Katie, Erin, and Lauren. I first began telling stories in 1989 when one of my daughters' teachers invited me to participate in story time. Now I perform at schools, conferences, festivals, museums, and bookstores throughout the United States and Canada. I also tell stories on the radio.

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Storytelling

What Makes a Good Storyteller?

A storyteller's tools are words. Carmen Agra Deedy works with words to create moods and to help you create images in your mind.

During her performance, listen carefully to the words. How do they help you picture the story in your mind?

Storytellers use their voices, facial expressions, sound effects, and body movements to make their stories more interesting and to express the moods and feelings in stories. A storyteller does not memorize a story word for word. The stories can change slightly with each telling.

During her performance, watch storyteller Carmen Agra Deedy carefully. See if you notice examples of how and when she makes her storytelling interesting by using her voice, face, or body.

Storytelling is a shared experience. It's a partnership between the storyteller and the listener. As the listener, you agree to be a partner in the storytelling. Listening to stories is different from watching TV or a movie, because you are in the same room with the storyteller. Talking and noise can distract the storyteller and disturb other audience members.

During Carmen Agra Deedy's performance, do your part by listening and watching carefully. If you are asked to participate, join in! Laugh if something is funny. Applaud for the stories you like. Enjoy being a partner with Carmen Agra Deedy. Have fun!

What Makes a Story Worth Telling?

- A good story keeps your attention.
- Usually, the story is fairly short.
- The characters and events must be interesting.
- There is some kind of problem, or conflict, that must be solved.
- If something unexpected happens—a surprise—that adds interest too.
- Many stories have a lesson or moral that teaches something about life.
- A good story makes you think.

After her performance, think about the stories that you heard Carmen Agra Deedy tell. Refer to the list above and consider how her stories were "worth telling."

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Picture This

A good storyteller evokes images in your mind–you "see" the story as it is told. Choose a partner. Take turns reading aloud these descriptions from some of Carmen Agra Deedy's stories. When you are the reader, try to read with expression. When you are the listener, close your eyes and try to picture in your mind what is being described.

- He was a brown old man, like wrinkled-up grocery bags.
- She was leaning into the ironing board as she pressed **sodden**, starchy trousers into crisp uniforms for my father to wear to the factory.
- Pushing the screen door and almost knocking my father off of the stoop, I rushed toward my bike, kicked the bike stand and wheeled it safely away from the bees.
- I was sweating bullets down the back of my yellow **seersucker** dress. It was pasted to my body, not from the Georgia heat, but from nervous anticipation.
- He lifted the glasses from a **bulbous** nose onto his massive gleaming head.
- Beads of perspiration had broken out across his upper lip and forehead like **sap** on a skinned pine.

sodden—wet, soaked

seersucker—a fabric, usually cotton, with a puckered surface

bulbous—shaped like a bulb; fat or bulging

sap—the juice of a plant or tree

Resources

If you want to read books written by the storyteller, look for:

Deedy, Carmen Agra. *Agatha's Featherbed: Not Just Another Wild Goose Story.* Atlanta: Peachtree Publications, 1991.

Deedy, Carmen Agra. *Library Dragon.* Atlanta: Peachtree Publications, 1994.

Deedy, Carmen Agra. *The Last Dance.* Atlanta. Peachtree Publications, 1995.

If you want to learn more about Cuba, look for:

Haverstock, Nathan. *Cuba in Pictures.* Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications, 1987.

Williams, Margot. *Cuba: from Columbus to Castro.* NY: Messner. 1982.

If you want more ideas about telling family stories, look for:

Winston, Linda. *Keepsakes: Using Family Stories in Elementary Classrooms.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997.

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Listen for These Lines

Storytellers choose their words carefully to make you feel as if you are there, experiencing the event being described. Read these lines and imagine what might be happening or what is being described. During the performance, listen for these lines and see how accurate your predictions were.

It was like white cold cotton candy that melted on contact.

The courtroom was packed and quiet. The silence, penetrated only by the whirring of the overhead fans, increased my tension.

...slow and drawn out like **molasses** flowing from a **Ball jar** on a hot August day.

From the porch swing, I awaited the results of her **culinary machinations** as the fragrance of cinnamon, vanilla, and lime **wafted** through the screen door.

"Carmen, baseball is a lot like life: if you can stand the smell, you're gonna love the game!"

"The grip of a Cuban mother is **tenacious** and one that, no matter how gentle, may take a lifetime to wrench free of."

molasses—a thick, dark-colored syrup

Ball jar—a special glass jar used for canning or preserving foods

culinary—having to do with cooking or the kitchen

machinations—plots or plans

wafted—traveled easily through the air

tenacious—persistent, not giving up easily

After the Performance:

Read these lines again to recall the stories they came from. Try to describe to a friend or family member what was happening or being described.

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Tell Your Own Story

Try this activity before attending the performance of *Growing Up Cuban In Decatur, Georgia.*

Everyone has stories to tell. Most of Carmen Agra Deedy's stories come from her experiences as a child. Think about your life. Choose one event from your past. It could be funny, sad, embarrassing–it's up to you. (For example: an adventure with a friend, the death of a pet, meeting a celebrity, a surprise, receiving an award.) What event do you choose? (Write this on the line below).

_____

Now try to remember as many details as possible. Here are some ideas to get you started:

People Who was there? What were they wearing?

Setting Where did your event take place? If it was inside, what was the room like? What furniture was there? What colors did you see? If it was outside, what was around you–buildings, trees, plants, cars? What was the weather like?

Sounds What sounds, such as music, voices, or machines, did you hear?

Smells What smells do you remember? Was someone cooking? Did you smell flowers?

Tastes If you tasted anything, what did it taste like?

Temperatures Was it hot or cold? What season was it? How were you dressed?

Feelings/emotions Try to remember as many as you can.

Most storytellers write down their stories to learn them. You should too. You don't have to write every word. Just list the main points you want to include in your story:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Now it's time to tell your story. Practice a few times and then tell some friends or family members. When you're finished, ask them these questions:

What did you like most about my story?

Was there anything you didn't understand?

Do you have any suggestions for improving my story?

After the Performance:

Now that you have seen and heard Carmen Agra Deedy perform her stories, what changes might you want to make to your story? How did her performance help you think of different ways to tell your story?

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